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Nixon's mini-summit coup in Paris dazzles diplomats

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ROME — President Nixon's diplomatic coup in Paris is still a lively topic of conversation in European embassy salons.

It is generally acknowledged the President's brief visit to the French capital to attend the memorial service for President Georges Pompidou turned out to be a stroke of good fortune for American diplomacy as well as a brilliant success for Mr. Nixon personally.

By taking advantage of the occasion to confer with the leaders of Western Europe and Japan as well as the President of the Soviet Union, President Nixon succeeded, in the opinion of many European diplomats, in re-affirming American leadership of the free world.

There is admiration for the political skill with which he stage-managed the meetings with the Soviet, European and Japanese leaders — all of whom came to see him at the residence of the American ambassador in Paris. Their willingness to pay this respect to him was viewed in itself as evidence of their desire to see him remain President of the United States.

By an irony of fate, President Pompidou in death gave to President Nixon what he had denied him in the last year of his life — the opportunity to have a summit meeting in Europe.

Last year was to be the "Year of Europe" for President Nixon. He had hoped to preside over a summit meeting of the Allies which would proclaim a new Atlantic Charter re-defining Western Europe's relations with the United States. President Pompidou was chiefly responsible for blocking this plan.

It was then hoped that a summit meeting could be held in Brussels early this month in connection with the 25th anniversary of NATO. This too, had to be abandoned when the French government opposed the kind of declaration of principles Washington wanted.

The last months of President Pompidou's life were marked by desperate French diplomatic efforts to persuade other European Allies to reject American leadership in favor of an autonomous European political community independent of U.S. influence and capable of playing a "third force" role between America and Russia.

With President Nixon in Paris for the Pompidou memorial service, the virtually leaderless French government was powerless to prevent him from having a summit meeting not only with other European Allied leaders, but with Soviet President Podgorny as well.

That Foreign Minister Michel Jobert, who led the efforts to block American diplomatic moves in Europe and the Middle East, was furious was evident in the officially inspired comments that appeared in the French press.

That "the superb and smiling resurgent American supremacy at the doors of the Gaullist citidel" would be considered an "indecent and inopportune challenge" was made clear by the rightwing newspaper L'Aurore.

Cynical commentators in other French newspapers sought to discount the importance of what President Nixon bad achieved. A writer in Figaro, France's leading morning newspaper, said the President acted like a sovereign welcoming the "homage of some of his European vassals." A cartoon in Figaro showed a figure representing Europe bending on one knee and kissing the ring on the outheld hand of Nixon seated on a throne. The "spectacle" of the Presinent receiving the European, Soviet and Japanese leaders was desbcribed as a "big show" without any profound significance."

However, other French newspapers recognized the importance of what the President had achieved. Le Monde, France's most influential newspaper, said the talks President Nixon had, some on his own initiative, some in response to requests, were both a riposte to French diplomacy and a "striking confirmation of doubts about the justification" of that diplomacy.

Wath particularly impressed the Europeans was the attention President Podgorny showed Mr. Nixon. He not only came to the American Embassy residence early in the morning to breakfast with the President, but he stayed — over two hours — longer than any other visitor, and allowed himself to be photographed in a warm and even jovial mood with the American President.

Reflecting the conviction of the British, French and West German governments that the President's talks had positive results, Chancellor Willy Brandt told the German people on his return from Paris that he felt those talks had helped to clear the air between Europe and the United States.